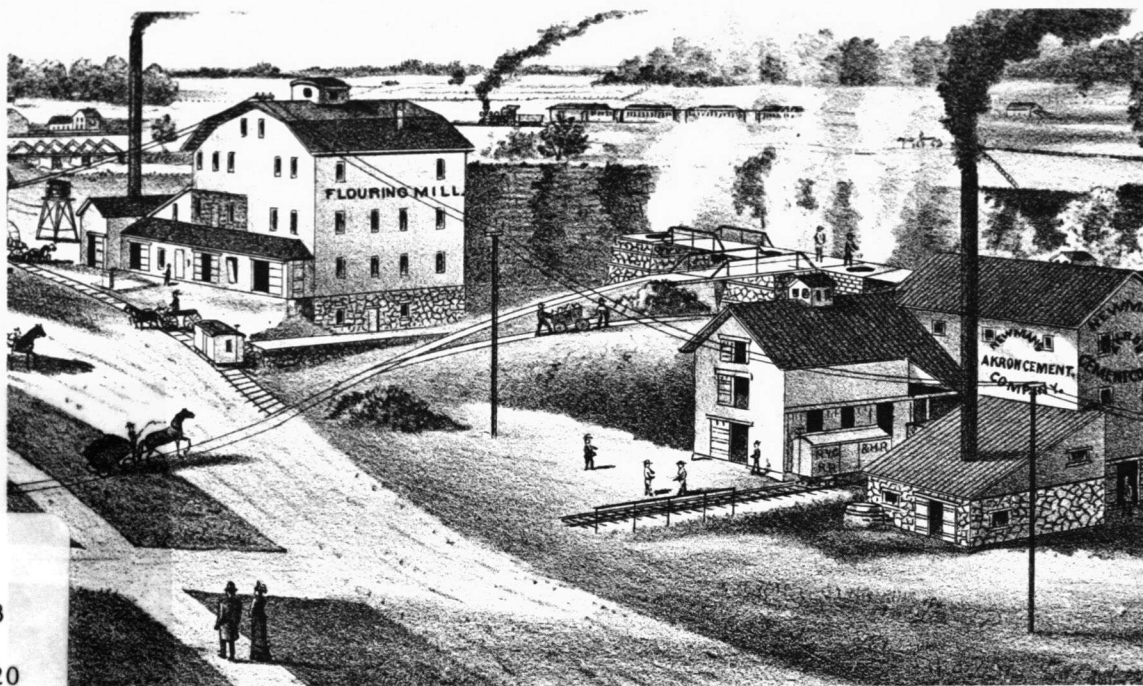


A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF NEWSTEAD



Flouring and Cement Works of E. J. Newman & Co., Akron.

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by Ethelyn Weller

The history of the Town of Newstead is very closely related to that of Clarence from which it was separated in 1823. It was first called Erie, but due to mail confusions with other towns by this name, it was changed to Newstead in 1831. This name was said to have been suggested by Mrs. Millard Fillmore after Newstead Abbey, home of the poet Lord Byron.

From the time of its first settlers Newstead has been a busy, prosperous

town with the Village of Akron its center. Other names were suggested for this village, one being Millville, another Leeds, and still another Brighton. The name "Akron," however, was adopted as it was claimed to be a scripture name derived from a Greek word "Akros," meaning a high place, probably suggested by the fact that there are hills about the town.

The history of Newstead goes back to the days when Genesee County was separated from Ontario in 1802, and in 1808 when Niagara County was formed from part of Genesee, with Erie being

created from a section of Niagara in 1821.

After the purchase of most of Western New York in 1792, the Holland Land Company realized that the huge tract they owned was not easily accessible for interested buyers so they hired Joseph Ellicott, a surveyor, to lay out a pattern for the vast lands. Accordingly, he built a road through the forests from end to end of the purchase and divided the land into townships and ranges. Newstead then was located in Township 12, range 5, and a part of Township 13, range 5 of this survey. There was also a small part of the Tonawanda Indian Reservation in a northeast section.

Much of Newstead is farmland but a ridge of limestone was early discovered to run across the center of the town. This has had a great influence on the town's development, both industrially and financially.

The area of Newstead was long the home of the Seneca tribe of the Iroquois Indians. The land had miles of unbroken forests and the moccasined feet of this tribe traveled along narrow trails between the Hudson River and Lake Erie across part of Newstead. The part they knew best is today the Village of Akron. Many of these Indians later settled on the Tonawanda Reservation.

One resident of this Reservation is well remembered in history, not only in this area but throughout the United States. He was Ely Parker, a Seneca, born in 1828 near Indian Falls in the Town of Pembroke. He studied law but was unable to practice because at that time he was not considered an American citizen. He then studied engineering and while on a project met a clerk in a local harness store named Ulysses S. Grant, who became a famous

General during the Civil War and in 1868 became the 18th President of the United States. After Grant was elected President he appointed Parker as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the first Indian to hold this position. Parker resigned in 1871. A New York State marker has been placed on the Tonawanda Reservation in his honor.

In 1826 the Ogden Company cleared the Indian title to several thousand acres of Indian land from the Tonawanda Reservation and offered it to the settlers. Three years later Jonathan Russell cleared a few acres in this section, built a frame house, and opened a store in what is now the Village of Akron.

In 1839 Jonathan Delano, a pioneer, discovered the limestone along Murder Creek, so named because a cruel murder was supposed to have once been committed along its banks. The Indians called it "See-Un-Gut" — Road of Distant Waters. The next year Delano built a small kiln where he produced small amounts of lime cement, which he sold. This was the start of what was to become the backbone of much of Newstead's later growth.

Murder Creek soon attracted other settlers. In those days it was very necessary to be near water as a source of power for the operation of the saw and grist mills so important for many of the settlers' needs. A hotel and a few small stores sprang up nearby, and this group became the nucleus around which Akron developed, being incorporated as a village in 1847.

When steam engines came into use they changed the industrial program of the Village. No longer were the water-powered mills necessary. Soon the "water limestone" that had been discovered by Delano was being mined



Tonawanda Indian Community Building, Newstead.

and shipped away in the form of "rock flour" to the outside world.

More success was to follow. James Montgomery had become the town's leading cement manufacturer and an authority on the product. About 1840 a Seneca Indian from the Reservation brought a piece of stone to Montgomery and asked him to crush it. It proved to be a good grade of gypsum, commonly called "plaster of Paris." A rich strata of the rock was found to be in the Reservation. On being ground this was found to make a white powder which at first was widely used as a fertilizer. Soon, however, it was to become a world known product with unlimited uses in combinations with other materials. It helped to make possible the development of one of the country's greatest companies — the National Gypsum Company. Special arrangements had to be made with the Indians for a lease to mine this important mineral deposit.

In 1853 or 1855, H. Cummings & Sons engaged in gypsum business. The raw material was obtained, as before, from the reservation. The passage of new laws regarding the management

of the reservation made difficulties for the business, and it closed about 1865. Later it was reopened by Cummings & Sons and eventually became known as the Akron Cement Works.

After 1890 the gypsum was recognized as an excellent building accessory as one of the ingredients for wall plaster. Small local groups formed companies, one of which was known as the Akron Gypsum Company, organized in 1901, but this company soon had difficulties and was closed.

About 1906 the American Gypsum Company started mining operations on a site two miles east of the Village of Akron. In 1923 a plaster mill was added, and a few years later the facilities for making plaster board were installed. In 1935 this company was purchased by the National Gypsum Company, and millions of tons of rock were mined from a rich vein. This mine was finally sealed in 1948.

Another branch of the company in Clarence, however, is still in operation, manufacturing one of the newer products called panel electric board. This is a radiant heated material used for radiant heat in ceilings and for other indoor heating purposes.

The oldest operative gypsum mine in New York State had been opened early in Akron's history and was still in operation when National took over. It was renovated in World War II, and miners were able to blast some 1,000 tons of rock a day from this old mine.

In 1798 an old Indian trail was opened as an early road that crossed the Reservation and ran west through Akron and Clarence. This was the first wagon track in Erie County. The "Buffalo Road" was opened about a year later.

The first land sold in what is now Newstead was purchased by Asa Chapman for \$2.75 an acre on November 3, 1801. Another Settler in 1801 was Peter Vandeventer who located on Buffalo Road and early in 1802 opened a log tavern, probably the first building in Newstead.

The first town meeting on the Holland Purchase was held in this tavern on March 1, 1803. Then the area was part of the Town of Batavia, Genesee County. At town meetings in 1803-5 Vandeventer was elected Supervisor. The meeting in 1805 was the first one in the new Town of Willink. From then on land was sold and homes and businesses set up. In 1806 Archibald S. Clarke opened the first store in Erie County outside Buffalo near Vandeventer's tavern. Clarke went on to become the first Postmaster in Clarence in about 1811 as well as a member of the Assembly from the old County of Niagara from 1808 to 1810. In 1812 he was elected the first State Senator from Erie County and served until 1816.

The first Methodist church was organized in 1807 with services held in Charles Knight's home, the first church organized in Erie County. The present Methodist church is an outgrowth of this old society. In the same year a small school kept by a Mr. Keith was started. In 1883 the Akron Union High School was organized, and a large brick building was erected in 1890. This building burned but was replaced in 1893. Today Newstead has an excellent Central School system which accommodates all students from the Town of Newstead, the Tonawanda Reservation and a few outlying districts.

Other churches followed the first Methodist society, which became the

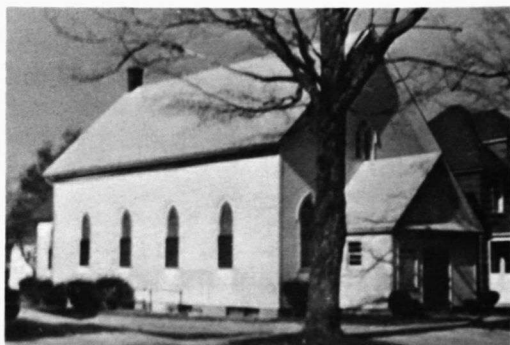


Archibald S. Clarke Store.

Methodist Episcopal Church and built a log meeting house in 1820. In 1836 Jonathan Russell donated land to this society, and a stone church was erected on this site. It was dedicated in 1840 and enlarged about 1865. At this time Russell also gave land for a park, a cemetery and the site for a town hall. An Erie County Sesquicentennial marker honors Mr. Russell's park gift.

A Baptist church was active for several years also near Vandeventer's home but in 1838 the society built a church in Akron, remodeling it in 1873. Later there was a division in this society and a second church was erected. There are still two Baptist churches in Akron.

A Presbyterian church was organized about 1820, its members coming from both Akron and Clarence. In 1839,



First Methodist Church, Akron.

however, this society was divided, and Akron built its own church in 1852. This society is no longer active. There is presently a United Presbyterian Church in Akron on the Tonawanda Reservation.

A Roman Catholic society was organized in 1847, the first Mass said in the home of Thomas Downey. A church was built in 1854, and in 1868 this was sold to the German Methodist Episcopal Church and a new church was built in 1883. A Free Methodist church was organized in 1885 and a German Lutheran in 1896. A German Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1867.

Akron's fire department at first consisted of an old-fashioned bucket brigade, succeeded by a chemical engine. This was replaced by two hand engines. In 1896, however, a volunteer fire department with two hose companies and a hook and ladder company was organized. Today there are two volunteer companies in Newstead, one in the Village of Akron, the other, the Newstead Volunteer Fire Company, located on Cummings Road.

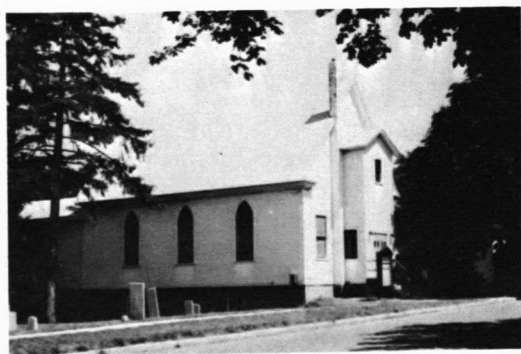
Akron is well provided with all the utilities. The first water line was installed in 1896 and has been improved and enlarged several times since. Nat-

ural gas was discovered on the Wilder farm about 1887. Also, the Akron Light, Fuel & Power Company was incorporated, its purpose being to supply the village with gas. For many years the town has been well serviced with electric power, and there is an adequate sewer system.

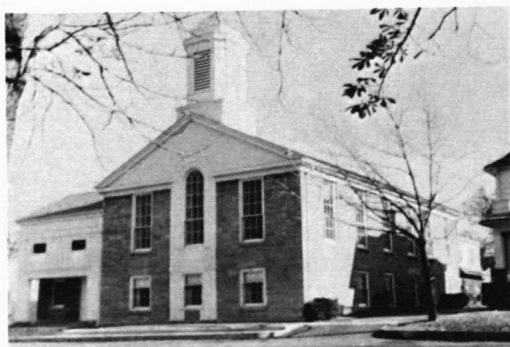
The first railroad in the county, except a short line that ran from Buffalo to Black Rock was through Newstead. This was started about 1835. This was horse-drawn and ran on wooden rails from Medina to Akron and thence to Richville in Genesee County. It was not a success. Later a short line called the West Shore ran through Newstead, but today the town's only line is the freight runs of the Penn-Central on the old New York, West Shore & Buffalo track lines.

There are several industries today in Akron. One very important one which is in the forefront of today's scientific development is Amax Specialty Metals Inc. This company was originally owned by the Carborundum Company, but in 1965 American Metal Climax Company bought half interest in the plant.

This purchase was completed two years later. The plant produces zirconium and hafnium metals, which are



Baptist Church, Akron.



Free Methodist Church, Akron.



Clark J. Twinn Octagon House.

relatively new metals with unusual properties which make them adaptable for use in the nuclear field for reactors and for similar purposes in atomic power plants and submarines. Amax has about 140 employees and is one of two Amax plants, the other one being in Parkersburg, Virginia.

There is another plant that is part of the Houdaille Industries called the Wales Strippit Company. There is Ford Gum & Machine Company, Inc. which makes gum balls among other things. The Rochester Button Company has been in Akron for many years. There is also the T. Whiting Manufacturing Company, which is well-known for its manufacture of overhead doors for trucks. A small industry but a busy one is Camelot Candies.

An interesting landmark of Akron is its octagonal house, one of two such

structures now in Erie County. It was fashioned after a Roman type mansion and was built over a century ago by Charles B. Rich for his bride. The octagon houses were a fad in the middle 1800's. This was brought about by the architecture book, *A Home For All*, written by Orson Fowler. Many octagon buildings had been constructed since Roman times, but it was Fowler who pointed out that such buildings received twice as much light, because the house had eight sides instead of four. The fad remained popular until the 1890's. Akron's octagon house has been given loving care and is an object of interest to all visitors to the village. A spiral stairway goes up through the center of the house and the attractive rooms are triangular, reminding one of a big piece of pie. After several owners, it was purchased in 1939 by Clark J. Twinn, an Akron attorney and a

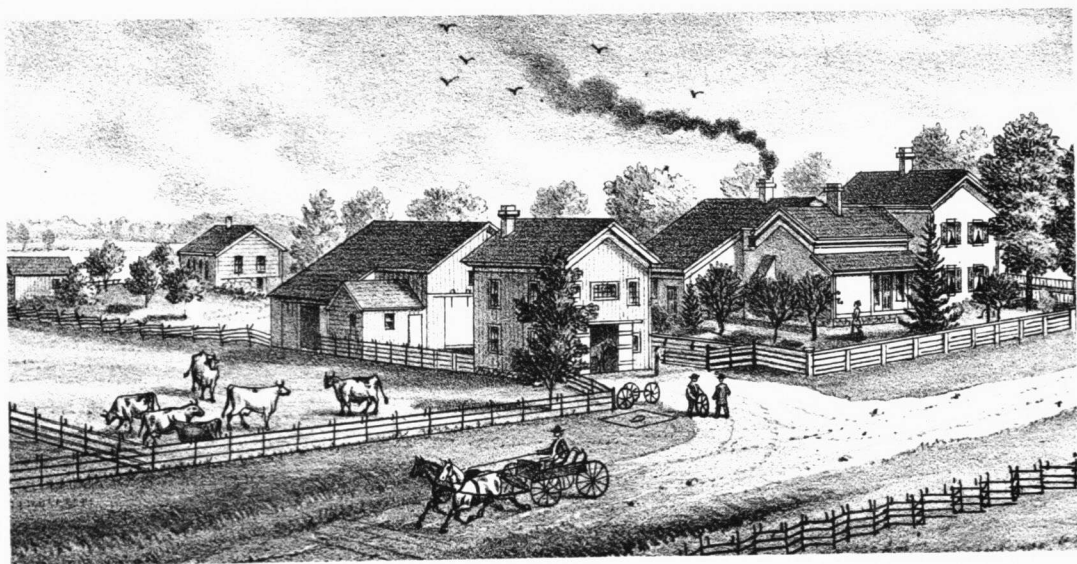


W. N. Hoag Residence and Lumber Yard.

direct descendant of Charles Rich. He has since died but Mrs. Twinn still lives in the old historic house.

There are two parks in Newstead. One is the small one in Akron, donated by Jonathan Russell and today maintained as a memorial to him. The other is the Akron Falls Park.

Newstead today remains one of the busier towns of Erie County. It is off the beaten way between Buffalo and Rochester and has developed its own industries and ways of living. Closely allied with Clarence it is still a highly independent town with a prosperous future ahead.



J. W. Tuttle Residence and Blacksmith Shop.

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